CARL ZIMMERMAN

LANDMARKS OF INDUSTRIAL BRITAIN

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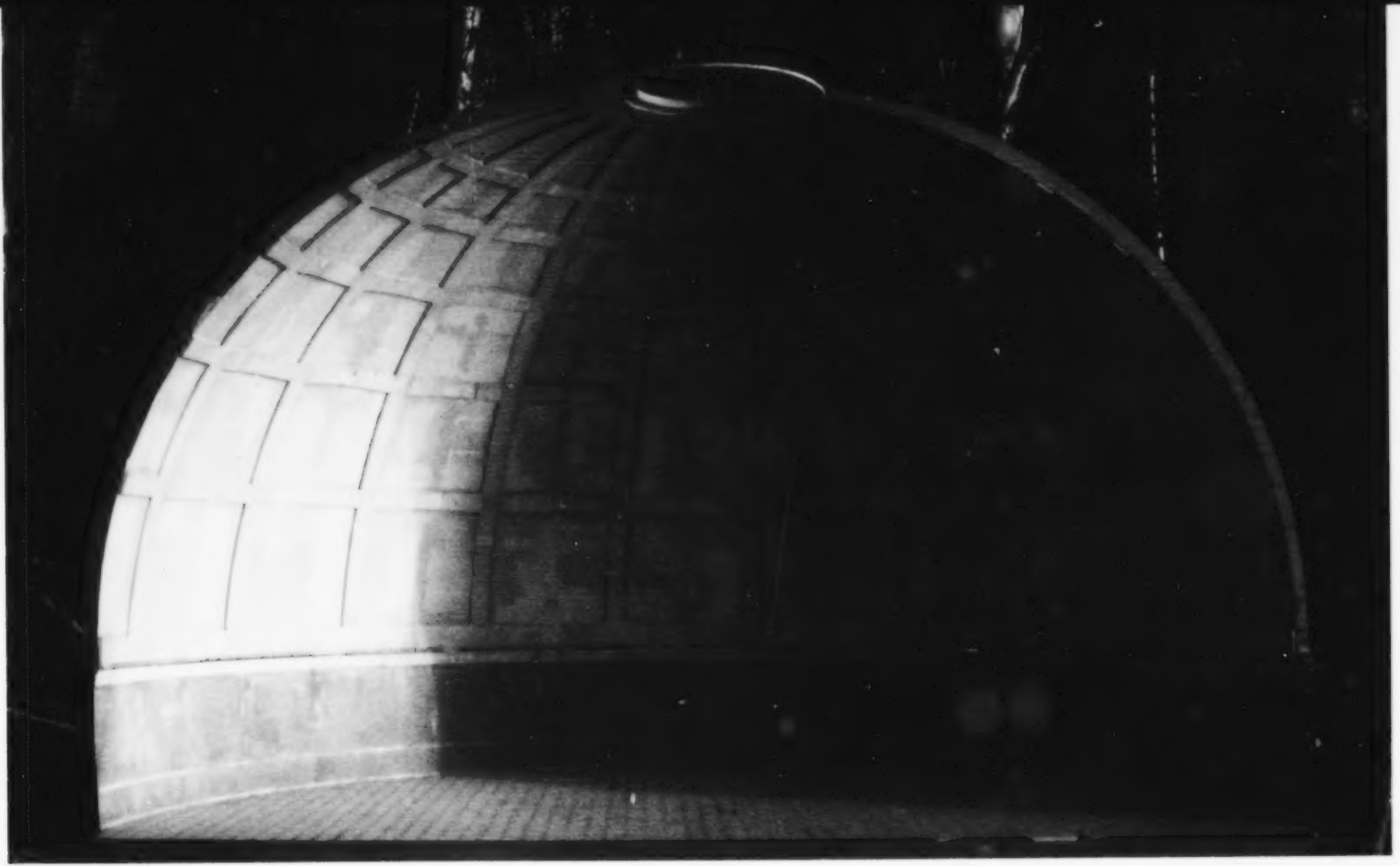
Landmarks of Industrial Britain



Museum (maquette) 2001

Landmarks of Industrial Britain

Carl Zimmerman

ART GALLERY OF NOVA SCOTIA · DUNLOP ART GALLERY

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The exhibition of Carl Zimmerman's recent photo-based work, Landmarks of Industrial Britain, *is the fruit of many labours and of several creative partnerships. For artist Carl Zimmerman and guest curator Robin Metcalfe, this project is a milestone in a long-standing conversation about architecture and design forms and how they both reflect and shape political and social relations. For his stewardship of the project, we would like to acknowledge Ray Cronin, in his role as Acting Senior Curator and Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Jacob Korczynski, Assistant Curator at the Dunlop Art Gallery, and Joyce Clark, Curatorial Assistant, have capably represented the other co-producing institution, contributing to the preparation of the exhibition and its catalogue.*

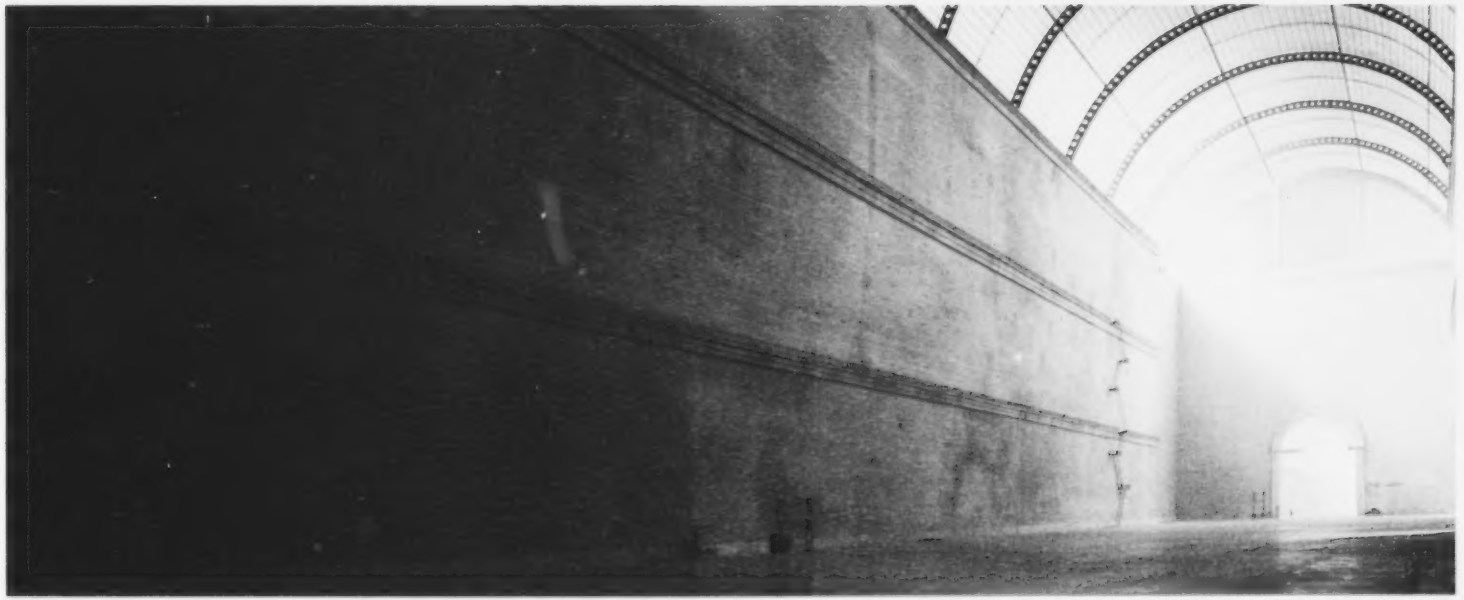
We are indebted to Robert Tombs for the beauty and elegance of the catalogue design. Sarah Fillmore, Special Projects Coordinator for the AGNS, also provided valuable assistance. Thanks go to Donna Raetsen-Kemp, Executive Director of the Station Gallery, Whitby, which we are pleased to welcome as a third hosting venue for the exhibition.

Both co-producing institutions wish to acknowledge their funding partners, in particular The Canada Council for the Arts, the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage and the Saskatchewan Arts Board. The artist wishes to acknowledge creation support from The Canada Council of the Arts and the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage.

Landmarks of Industrial Britain

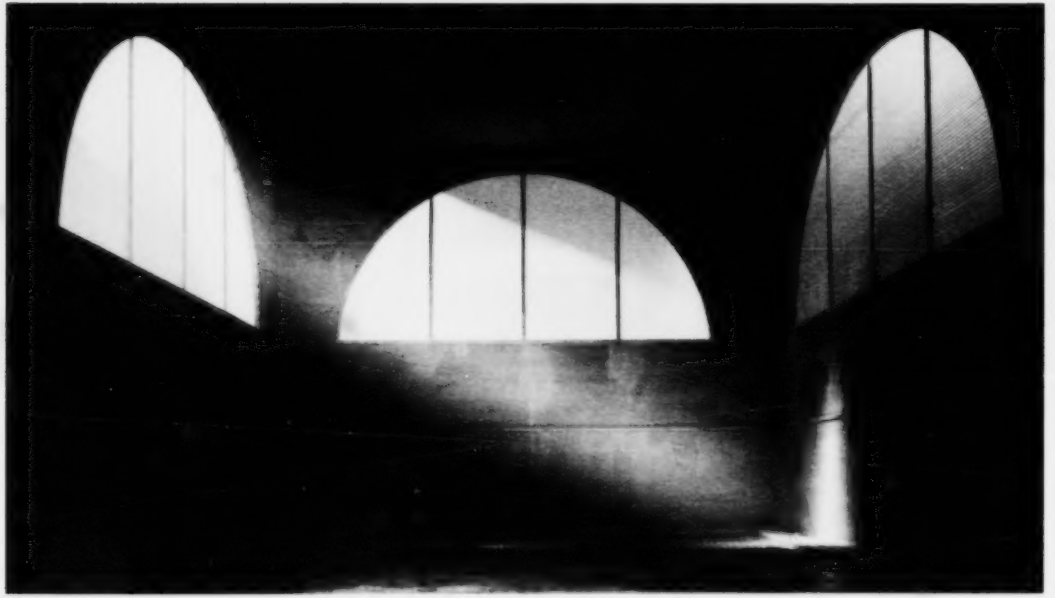
Archives, Leeds, England 2006

Mausoleum, Birmingham, England 2000

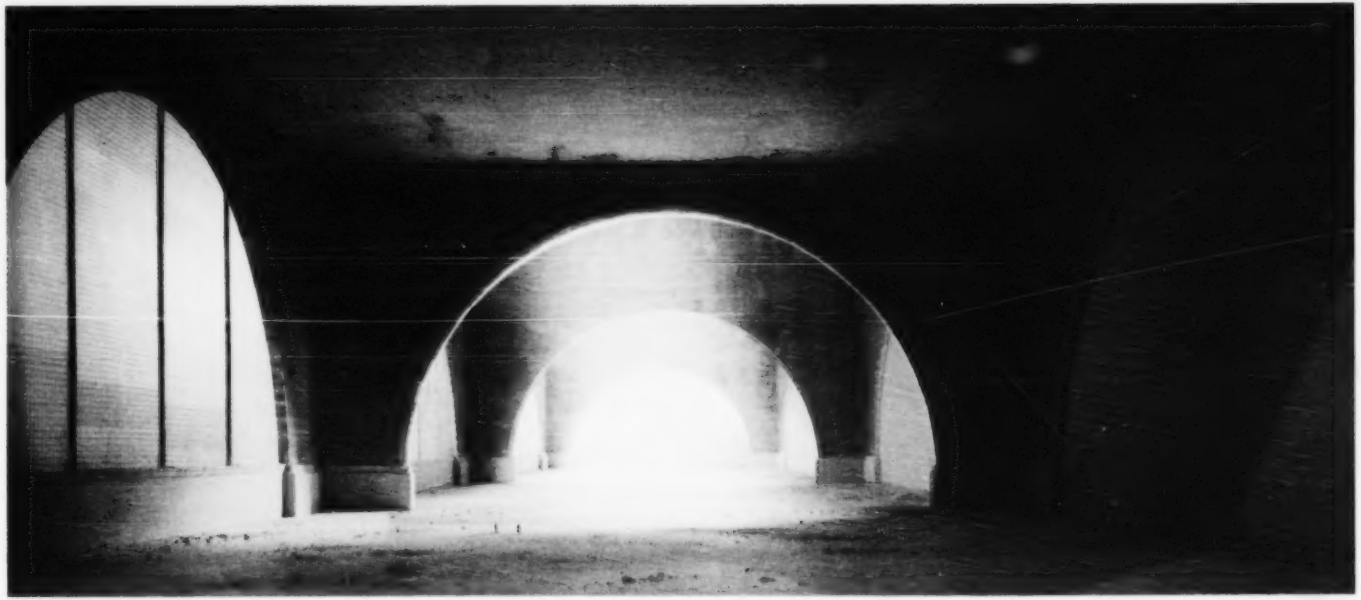


Mausoleum, Birmingham, England (interior) 2006

Museum, Birmingham, England 2006



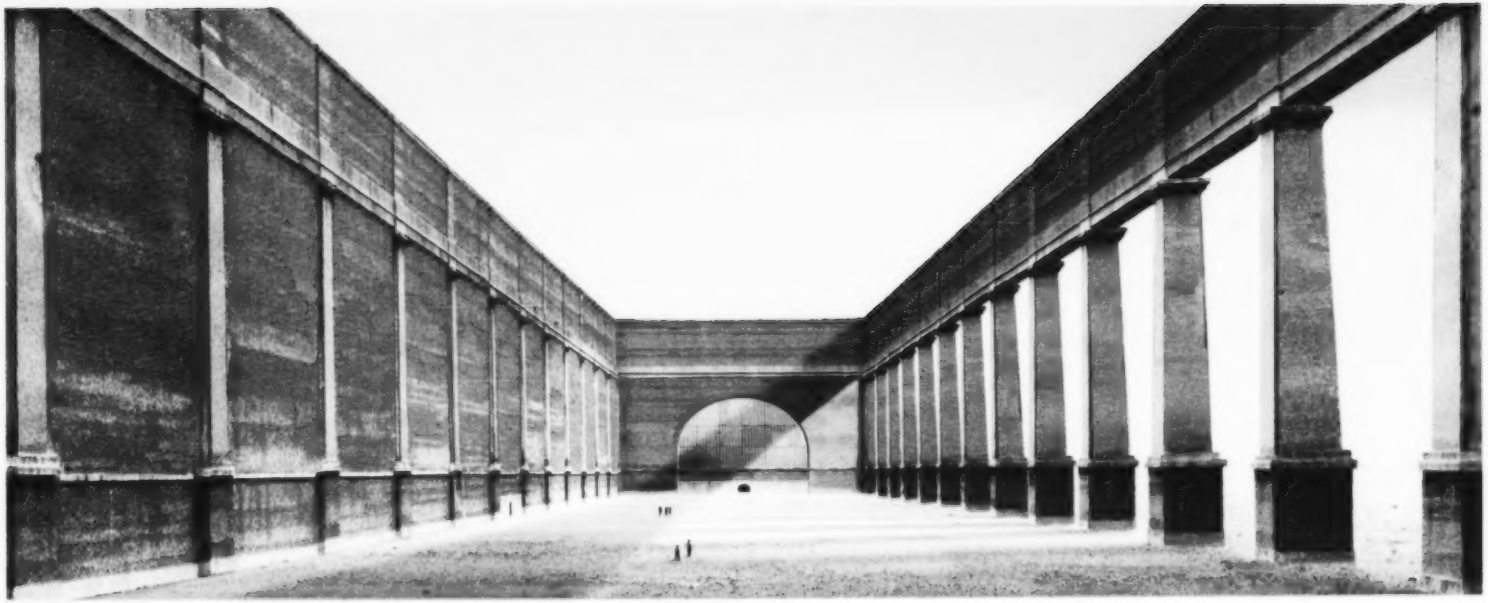
Public Baths, Manchester, England 2006



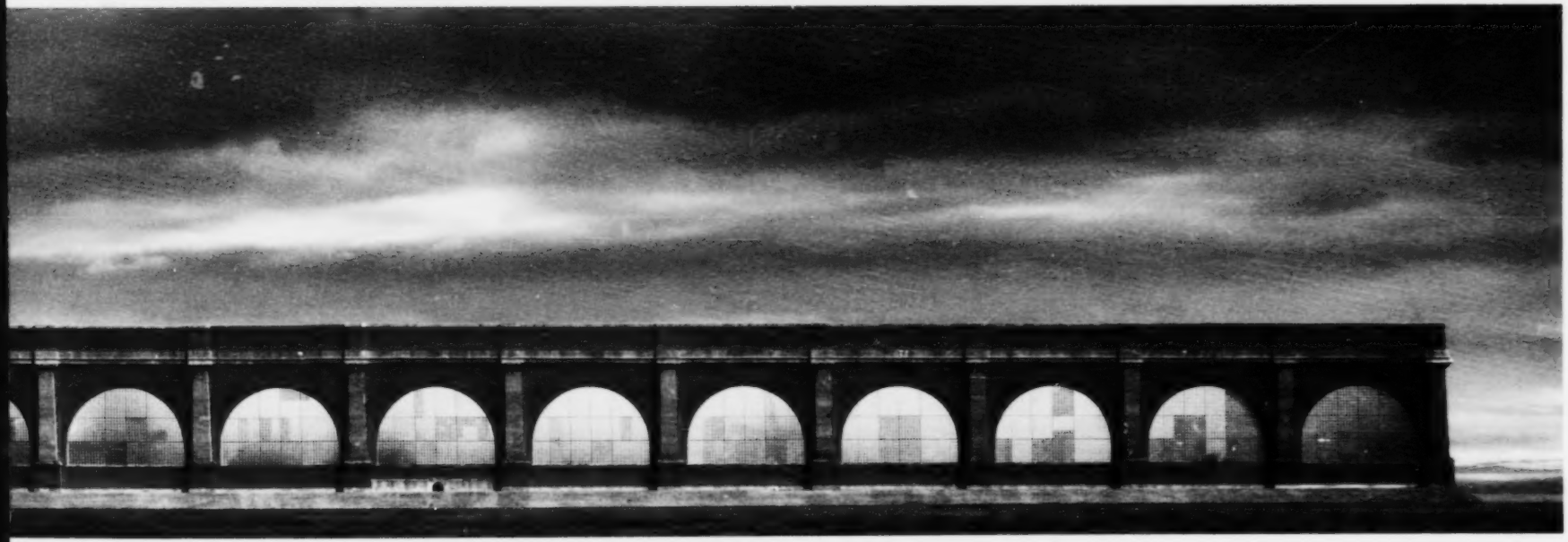
Science Building, London, England 2006

Unitarian Church, Manchester, England 2005

Unitarian Church, Manchester, England (interior) 2006



War Memorial, Leeds, England 2005



Middle School, Liverpool, England 2006

The Age of Giants

THERE IS A 1996 photograph by Lebanese-Canadian photographer, Rawi Hage, of the ruined interior of the Opera on Beirut's Martyrs' Square. Disordered ranks of theatre seats crumble before a bright open space where the backstage fly tower ought to stand, the back wall blasted open to reveal a series of tall, vertical windows.

I came across the image in August 2003, and told Carl Zimmerman in an e-mail that it reminded me of his own photo-based work. Hage's photograph bore an uncanny formal resemblance to *Power Plant, Mount Hamilton Hospital*, from Zimmerman's 1997 series *Lost Hamilton Landmarks*. It was a case of an actual ruin (the Opera) recalling an imaginary one.

Both Hage's photograph and its caption caused me to do a mental double take, as I momentarily mistook the name 'Beirut' for 'Bayreuth.' Every opera fan knows Bayreuth in Bavaria to be among the most privileged operatic sites in Europe. Its stage is the authorised setting for Richard Wagner's works, each a *Gesamtkunstwerk* unifying architectural space, sound and ritual. What belated calamity, I wondered, might have destroyed the *Festspielhaus*, which had survived the Nazi dictatorship with which Wagner's art was infamously associated?

Lost Hamilton Landmarks was a major component of Zimmerman's 1997 solo exhibition at Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, which I produced as a then-independent curator, and which toured to the Art Gallery of Hamilton. Writing about Zimmerman's early installation work in the exhibition catalogue, *The Utopian Architectures of Carl Zimmerman*, I had spoken of the artist's installations as examples of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Insinuating sound, light and subtle physical interventions into existing architectural spaces, Zimmerman had developed a working method of photographing his maquettes – initially to anticipate the effects of light on his installation spaces – that eventually became an artistic practice in itself.[1]

Beginning in *Lost Hamilton Landmarks*, he presented these photographs of maquettes as stand-alone works, each purporting to document a monumental but derelict structure that might be found in the real world. In fact, none of the buildings has ever existed, although the names he has given them echo those of actual buildings and their architecture recalls the features of many civic and industrial structures of the early twentieth

century. Zimmerman's images of non-existent buildings bore a tantalising familiarity and similarity to actual structures in his home town of Hamilton, Ontario. More than once, I encountered someone who had lived in Hamilton declaring, with full confidence, that they remembered the building in a Zimmerman photograph.

Lost Hamilton Landmarks tweaks the viewer's memory principally through its references to the characteristic architectural styles of the period between the First and Second World Wars: the architectures of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany, the Stalinist Soviet Union and the social democratic governments of Britain's Labour Party and Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal.

Landmarks of Industrial Britain is the artist's second major series of images in an ongoing project, to photograph imaginary buildings of massive scale, sublime desolation and utopian, authoritarian aesthetics. Developed consecutively over more than a ten-year period, the two series are based on photographs of scale maquettes that the artist has constructed in his Cape Breton studio. The effect is one of persuasive illusion, convincing the viewer that he or she is seeing something that does or did exist as a built architecture, even while the evidence of the image cannot remain credible in the face of a critical examination. The curtain walls of masonry or glass are so high they would collapse under their own weight. These buildings *could* not exist; yet our desire that they should, seduces us into believing in them.[2]

Whereas the *Lost Hamilton Landmarks* hewed close to the utopian narratives of an actual lived history — that of industrial architectures in state-directed societies of the early 20th century — *Landmarks of Industrial Britain* proposes an alternative history set in the 19th century, one in which the workers' state imagined by Marx and Engels emerged, as they believed it likely to do, in the most advanced industrial nation of their time: England. Zimmerman raises his imagery to another order of magnitude, moving beyond the utopian fantasies of actual, historically existing societies to the fantasy of a utopian society that never quite came into being.

This shift parallels a crucial change in Zimmerman's working method. *Lost Hamilton Landmarks* employed strictly conventional photo-

graphy (black-and-white film subjected to commercial colour process), achieving its illusory effects through the material manipulation of the object photographed. Any trickery was achieved by old-fashioned hand-craft, in the painting and lighting of the maquette surfaces. The newer work, on the other hand, freely employs digital techniques to enhance and extend the image. This allows Zimmerman to edit photographs that he still generates through the meticulous construction of maquettes. The resulting digital prints, presented in this exhibition on horizontal display surfaces, are of a greatly enhanced scale and, in many cases, extreme horizontality. Addressing themselves to specific British and Continental architectural and social histories of the 18th through early 20th centuries, they move towards the aesthetic condition of fine historical engravings.

The current series also favours straight-on frontal presentation in all of its exterior views, giving them the stiff formality and slight unreality of architectural elevations. In the majority of interior views, we are given symmetrical vistas down a central axis. The *Unitarian Church, Manchester, England*, for example, consists of a recession of arched interior spaces with closely spaced, engaged columns along the sides. In these, and also in a smaller number of images where the perspective is at an angle, Zimmerman deploys light to dramatic, even histrionic effect, enhancing their awe and mystery. As in the illusory upstage vistas of Baroque stage design, we look through a series of receding spaces, often beyond a darker forespace into a deeper space brilliantly illuminated by raking light. This theatrical device, evocative of the sublime, is common to both classical salon painting and nineteenth-century stagecraft.

Zimmerman attributes to his photographs "an essentially utopian aesthetic with ambivalent understandings." Humour, nostalgia and critical deconstruction co-exist in his work, as they often do in our responses to totalitarian aesthetics. "Fascinating fascism," in Susan Sontag's famous phrase,[1] shares its allure with the less radically discredited, but equally utopian, architectures of socialism and New Deal social democracy.

There is something both ominous and ludicrous about gigantic architecture. It is characteristic of totalitarian regimes confined to small, impoverished countries. The Romanian dictator Nicolae Ceausescu had

7,000 homes and 26 churches in central Bucharest levelled to create a civic space for his Casa Poporului (House of the People), variously reported to be the second or third largest building in the world, with its 35 million cubic feet of marble and 4,500 chandeliers. In the case of small dictatorships building huge edifices, an inverse relationship exists between the agoraphobia that the structures induce and the civic claustrophobia of the repressive regimes that they house.

Several of Zimmerman's *Landmarks of Industrial Britain* echo the warm sandstone facing and the horizontal courses of Sir Edwin Lutyens' Viceroy's House in New Delhi (1923–31), now known as the Rashtrapati Bhavan and housing the President of India. Less aesthetically disastrous than the Casa Poporului, it nevertheless rivals it in scale, covering an area equal to that of the palace at Versailles. Designed to represent iconographically the permanence of British rule in India, it was completed only a few years before the latter country's independence.

Gigantism thus also characterises regimes condemned by their own inflated sense of historic mission. Albert Speer's designs for a radically rebuilt Berlin openly embraced their future as ruins, anticipating their participation in the inevitable twilight of the gods in whose name they had been built.

The gigantic appears often with the manic aspect of desperation, as if sheer monumentality might forestall the disintegration of something that is clearly untenable. The so-called '105 Building' that dominates the skyline of Pyongyang – said to match George Orwell's Ministry of Truth not only in its pyramid structure but also in its height (300 metres) and number of rooms (3,000) – remains unfinished and unapproachable, abandoned in 1991 as structurally unsound.

There is something terminal, then, about gigantism in architecture. Just as the indulgences sold to finance the construction of St. Peter's in Rome contributed, through the Reformation, to the near total collapse of the Roman church north of the Alps, one senses that the forces mustered to create something as huge as Zimmerman's behemoths could not be sustained.

A common motif of totalitarian and monumental architectures is

their reliance on the regularity of the (semi)circle and (hemi)sphere to express purity and ideal form. It is an aesthetic thread that links the barrel-vaults and 'Romanesque' arches of imperial Roman architecture to its recapitulation in the Baroque forms of St. Peter's in Rome and the impressive spherical dome of Lutyens' Viceroy's House. Vast superhuman spheres are the main features of both Étienne-Louis Boullée's 1784 *Project for a Memorial to Isaac Newton* and Albert Speer's mercifully unbuilt 300-metre-high dome to shelter Nazi rallies in Berlin. The latter both share an ancestor in the coffered, perfectly hemispherical (in its interior dimensions) dome of the ancient Roman Pantheon, a structure that Zimmerman consciously mimics in several works, particularly *Museum, Birmingham, England*.

Zimmerman's *Public Baths, Manchester, England* and *Science Building, London, England* draw on the classical antecedents of the Basilica of Constantine, with its vast barrel vaults opening into flat masonry walls, and the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, where semicircular arches define a square space supporting a hemispherical dome. The interior of the *Mausoleum, Birmingham, England* features an enormous barrel-vaulted glass and steel roof, like that of the 1,800-foot-long Crystal Palace.

The Crystal Palace stands at the juncture of two divergent streams of public architecture: the homogenising, monumental civic space of a unified polity and the heterogenous, theatrically variable space of commercial spectacle. This second stream leads from the Universal Exposition through the European galleria to the contemporary North American enclosed mall. As I have noted elsewhere, most contemporary public structures devote only minimal resources to their exteriors and are chiefly concerned with an illusory internal space, in which flimsy, essentially theatrical means are used to evoke "the illusion that this steel and concrete barn is a château or a village market."[4]

One should not, therefore, be surprised to see the opera itself appropriated to the consumer fantasia of contemporary commerce. In the nineteenth century, opera reached its apotheosis as the great romantic art form, a theatre of the sublime (and, not infrequently, the ridiculous). In 2001, the Beirut Opera building became home to the first Virgin Megastore

in the Middle East. During recent protests against Syrian domination of Lebanon, the store provided free use of its bathrooms to demonstrators.[5]

The exhaustion of twentieth-century revolutionary narratives, as collectivist political utopias cede to a privitised theatre of desire, marks our passage from Marx and Engels to Marks and Spencer. As we look back at what we have lost, Carl Zimmerman's *Landmarks of Industrial Britain* serve as monuments to an heroic social order that never was.

ROBIN METCALFE
Director/Curator
Saint Mary's University Art Gallery

1. Robin Metcalfe, *The Utopian Architectures of Carl Zimmerman* (Halifax: Saint Mary's University Art Gallery, 1997).

2. Some elements of the present essay were first developed in my essay on Carl Zimmerman's work, "The Aesthetics of Power," *CPhoto* 56 (January 2007), pp. 5–11.

3. Susan Sontag, "Fascinating Fascism," *New York Review of Books*, 6 February 1975, republished in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1980), 73–105.

4. Robin Metcalfe, "Specular Towers: Architecture and the Aerial View," *Prefix Photo* 7 (May 2003), pp. 16–23. Walter Benjamin examined the origins of the mall is his great unfinished Arcades Project (Passagenwerk). See Pierre Missac, *Walter Benjamin's Passages* (translated by Shierry Weber Nicholsen) (Boston: MIT Press, 1995).

5. Stephen Zacks, "The Heart of Beirut," www.metropolismag.com, 20 February 2006.

No Place like Utopia

UTOPIA IS A SYNONYM, of sorts, for paradise, but the word does not describe any earthly, or even heavenly, garden. Rather, a utopia is, at best, an impractical ideal; one that is excellent in theory, but best not put to the test of practice. Sir Thomas More first used the word to describe such a place in 1516, when he set his romantic political and social paradise in *Utopia*. That a snake lurked in this allegorical garden would have been apparent to any educated 16th century reader – 'utopia' is from the Greek and it means, literally, 'no place.'

That utopias do not, perhaps cannot, exist, did not discourage More's fictional Utopians, nor has it discouraged legions of social experimenters, political theorists, religious dreamers, activists, revolutionaries and zealots of all sorts, from trying to create their versions of the earthly paradise, and, what's more, to share them (or inflict them upon) their fellow human beings. After all, merely one Utopian would not Utopia make.

Every passing century since the publication of More's allegory has spawned its share of idealists trying to remake the world according to their tenets, and all of them, in some way or another, have claimed that theirs was a mission for the public good. Of course, how much evil we do in doing 'good' is one of the persistent themes of art, and one of the most predictable of human behaviours.

Despite this predictability, systems designed to make us better people continue to be conceived, and adherents continue to try and foist them on others, sometimes peacefully, but too often with violence. That was certainly a defining feature of the century that has recently passed, one that will go down as the bloodiest in human history (unless our own unhappily surpasses it), and it is truly shocking to realise how much of that blood was shed for someone's idea of paradise.

The First World War, for instance, can be seen as the death throes of an old social order, that of the nobility, of inherited privilege, of empire. This old order was finally swept away by the force of modernity, a process that had taken several hundred years. Tragically, at least in Europe, it was soon all too evident that the Modern offered little by way of humanity and compassion. Rather, the systems of modernity – technocracy, bureaucracy, efficiency – depended upon the people conforming to them. The blood of

a generation had hardly been absorbed into the soil of Europe before it was again the site of a conflagration, a war between ideas: fascism, communism and capitalism, a war that cost millions of lives, that wiped out a way of life in Europe that was hundreds of years old, and that ended up lasting over fifty years. As World War I did not really end with the Treaty of Versailles, World War II did not finally end until the fall of the Berlin wall. Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Franco — their 'perfect' societies may now be dust, but the ruins remain, scattered across Europe's physical, intellectual and emotional landscapes.

If the 20th century's utopias were more malignant than benign, that wasn't always the case. In the 18th and 19th centuries a number of utopian communities were founded: religious, secular and even commercial. I lived in the remnants of one in Fredericton, a former village called Marysville that featured a mill, workers' houses, two churches (high and low) as well as amenities such as a school, a company store, a recreation hall, a doctor's office and so on, all constructed for the benefit of his workers by one 'Boss' Gibson, a 19th century cotton and ship-building magnate. That he was also a utopian idealist was apparent in that he ended his days penniless. His was a social experiment, an attempt to reconcile capitalism and generosity, profit and social justice. Not surprisingly, it failed. Despite the difficulty of reconciling such polar opposites, our modern welfare states are rooted in such utopian projects, although our states tend to be based in pragmatism rather than idealism.

Things are only intelligible if there is something against which to measure them — what philosophers such as Martin Heidegger and Charles Taylor have defined as a 'horizon.' The horizon is the measure by which things have importance, the context that allows us to choose one thing over another as worthy of attention. Without a horizon all things are the same — equally unintelligible. Utopia is a new now, an attempt to supplant one horizon, one field against which human activity is measured, with another, a new set of moral imperatives and social norms. Some of these ideas succeed — think of democracy in the 19th and 20th centuries — and some fail, such as theocracy in the West, or the Marxist-Leninist 'dictatorship of the proletariat,' although that, perhaps, is simply another form of theocracy.

Carl Zimmerman's utopias mix fiction with history, or at least with historical plausibility. His photographs and installations have consistently explored the ruins of modernity, the remnants of systems whose efficacy has been exposed as wishful thinking. His fictional pasts actually speak to the present, to the ruins that we inhabit in our daily lives. Zimmerman's invented buildings, and the tiny figures that inhabit them, are more than mere architecture. These are grandiloquent statements, pacans to the public good. Just think of the titles of the works from *Landmarks of Industrial Britain*: *Archives*, *Mausoleum*, *Museum*, *War Memorial*, *Middle School*, *Public Baths*, *Science Building*, *Unitarian Church*. These imagined sites are far from neutral: rather, they inhabit central positions in any society; they are the sites where the people gather to learn, to celebrate, to mourn and to worship. These are the stages upon which nationalist myths are played out.

Zimmerman has focused on neo-classicism in architecture, an apt choice given the romantic roots of so much Modernist systemic thinking. German Romanticism, in particular, was a wellspring for the ultra-nationalist, undeniably utopian project of the National Socialists. Nazi architecture, as well as Nazi visual art, was aggressively neo-classical in form. Of course, so too were so many of the workers' monuments of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. And, of course, so too were the national architectures of two previous revolutions: the French and the American.

Zimmerman's architecture for his failed worker's state in Britain is in ruins, however, and was conceived that way. As such, it shares another strain with the neo-classical thinkers of the enlightenment and after: the folly.

The Romantic poets and philosophers also sought out ruins, seeking the sublime, the *frisson* that comes from awe and from the sense of standing on a precipice, on the brink of untold depths of time. Perhaps the most famous example is Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822), whose "Ozymandias" is the gold standard of 'ruin' poetry:

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read,
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them, and the heart that fed,
And on the pedestal these words appear:
"My name is Ozymandias, King of Kings:
Look upon my works, ye Mighty, and despair!"
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away.

The architectural follies of the Romantics and their followers often saw ruins being constructed specifically to inspire the sense of the sublime that Shelley so aptly evokes with his image of "lone and level sands" stretching far away. These ruins are evidence of failed horizons, they are sublime because in contemplating them we are, in fact, facing the abyss.

Like Shelley's desert, Zimmerman's *Landmarks* can be read as allegory, as a deconstruction of notions of the past to make sense of the present. Craig Owens, in his seminal essay on Post-modernism, *The Allegorical Impulse*, makes the case for allegory as being the defining feature of this latest stage of the Modern. The allegorical, the presentation of moral fables in a fictional context, has been frowned upon by generations of art theorists, but Owens points out, correctly I believe, that it is precisely as the allegorical that the Post-modern impulse is most apparent.

Post-modern critiques of culture are based in deconstructing the context within which we live, in questioning the very nature of our assumptions about our society. But if culture is our (human) nature, how do we step back from it? We inhabit our culture like goldfish in a bowl — how do we get outside in order to look back in?

Well, if we were to follow Carl Zimmerman's example, the

answer is, obliquely. Zimmerman's photo-works and his installations are so powerful because they are so apt: not in relation to mythical workers from his imagined 19th century workers' state, but rather because he captures *our* context, a context of shifting horizons, clogged with the dust and rubble of ruined systems, shattered dreams, failed utopias.

There is no place like Utopia, but then how could there be? We live in a flawed world, filled with ruins, and the sands are always encroaching.

Zimmerman's work is profoundly political, and by using the allegorical method of a loaded fable he is able to look squarely into the sun of our own perceptions, to pick out structures against the far horizon. He leads us to the edge of the abyss and leaves us teetering – the most dangerous, the most exhilarating and, yes, the most sublime place to be.

RAY CRONIN
Senior Curator and
Curator of Contemporary Art
Art Gallery of Nova Scotia

All dimensions are in centimetres, height preceding width and depth.

All maquettes are comprised of wood, cardboard, MDF, foamcore, paint, acetate and wire mesh. All prints are digital ink-jet on archival paper. Sizes vary according to the specific edition.

List of Works

MAQUETTES

1
Middle School 2002
32.4 x 342.9 x 6

2
Archives 2002
54 x 182.9 x 14

3
Museum 2001
99.1 x 154.9 x 86.4

4
Science Building 2003
58.4 x 121.9 x 121.9

PRINTS

5
War Memorial, Leeds, England 2005
43.2 x 71.1

6
Public Baths, Manchester, England
2006
58.4 x 86.4

7
Middle School, Liverpool, England
2006
42.5 x 124.5

8
Archives, Leeds, England 2006
45.7 x 98.4

9
Science Building, London, England
2006
52.1 x 94

10
Museum, Birmingham, England 2006
52.1 x 90.8

11
Mausoleum, Birmingham, England
2000
45.7 x 106.7

12
Mausoleum, Birmingham, England
(interior) 2006
50.2 x 95.3

13
Title Page 2006
90.8 x 67.9

14
Unitarian Church, Manchester, England
2005
42.5 x 121.3

15
Unitarian Church, Manchester, England
(interior) 2006
52.7 x 90.8

Biography

CARL ZIMMERMAN grew up in Hamilton, Ontario and moved to Nova Scotia in 1974, after briefly attending McMaster University and the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design. He currently lives in Marble Mountain, Nova Scotia.

His work has been shown nationally and internationally, at venues that include the Art Gallery of Hamilton, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, the National Arts Centre, the Šternberk Installation Symposium, Czech Republic, and most recently the Confederation Centre Art Gallery. Recent awards include grants from the Canada Council for the Arts and the Pollack Krasner Foundation and a residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin in 2001. His work has been reviewed in *ArtsAtlantic*, *BorderCrossings*, *Canadian Art*, *CVphoto* and *Sculpture*, and he is represented in numerous public and private collections, including the Canada Council Art Bank, the Art Gallery of Hamilton, the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Museum London, the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and the Owens Art Gallery.

In 2006, his work will be featured in the Magenta publication *Carte Blanche*, a definitive review of contemporary Canadian photography.

Carl Zimmerman is represented by Stephen Bulger Gallery, Toronto and buynewart.com, London, England.

Carl Zimmerman: Landmarks of Industrial Britain

Catalogue of an exhibition circulated by the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. Guest curator: Robin Metcalfe. The exhibition and catalogue are a co-production and co-publication of the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia and the Dunlop Art Gallery.

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